

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 29 March 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Alex Farquharson (Vice-Chair),
Jim Brown, Nazmin Chowdhury, Wendy Kerby and Anne Wells.

Councillor Julie Ashley-Wren (Substitute)

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.20pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Stephen Booth (substituted by Councillor Julie Ashley-Wren), Adrian Brown and John Duncan.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 CRIME & DISORDER COMMITTEE

The Select Committee sitting as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee, received a presentation from Inspector Patrick McPeake from Herts Constabulary on community safety matters that the Police had been engaged in over the past year.

As well as Inspector McPeake, the Executive Portfolio Holder responsible for Community Safety, Councillor Jackie Hollywell and the Council's Community Safety Manager were also in attendance at the meeting.

The Chair advised that she had asked the Police for a statement in relation to the recent review by Baroness Casey into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service.

Inspector McPeake began by giving assurances to the Committee that Hertfordshire Police had the appropriate processes and procedure in place to address those issues raised in Baroness Casey's report. He advised that the mechanisms for anyone both internal and external to the Police, were in place for them to come forward with any concerns. He did, however, agree there was work for the Police to do to restore and maintain public confidence and trust following recent troubling incidents.

The Inspector then gave a presentation to the Committee around the issues of burglary in the Town and the use of cannabis in the Town.

Burglary

The following points were made to the Committee in respect of burglary in the Town:

- 78 residential (dwelling) burglaries had been reported between 31 January 2022 and 1 February 2023. This was made up of 52 full offences, where entry had actually been gained and items stolen and 23 attempted offences where entry had been tried but was unsuccessful. The final three offences related to aggravated and distraction offences where offenders had distracted, often lied to homeowners to gain entry and steal. Members were pleased to note that this was a quite rare occurrence in Stevenage;
- A location map was shared with the Committee. Most localities had only singular offences and the most prevalent offending time period was 06:00 – 18:00 hrs;
- In relation to burglary residential (non- dwelling) there had been 62 business full offences and 8 attempts plus 42 non-dwelling full offences with 7 attempts. It was noted that the focus of this offending type was mainly within the Town Centre area;
- The Committee was advised that the Police had identified a suspect in 15.8% of investigations with a charge rate of 8%. Nationally the charge rate was 5% with the whole of Hertfordshire at 3.8%;
- Stevenage currently had the largest Scorpion Team in any CSP. These were proactive plain clothed officers who prioritised the pursuit and arrest of key individuals including burglars;
- A number of key investigatory reviews were currently being undertaken by the Police to identify patterns and themes and to ensure the standard of investigations was thorough and consistent and ensured certain actions took place at all residential burglaries. Personal attendance by both the initial officer and a detective was also a target for the Police;
- All forensic hits relating to Stevenage CSP (fingerprint, DNA, blood etc) were reviewed and it was reported that no forensic hits on burglars were outstanding.

The Chair thanked the police for their increased visible patrols of the Town including the Westgate Centre which had made a big difference and increased the confidence of the Town Centre business owners.

Cannabis

The following points were made to the Committee in respect of the prevalence of cannabis in the Town and what was being done to address this:

- In total, cannabis accounted for 34% of drug type found across the county and was the largest single drug. Across all CSP's Stevenage had the highest for all drug type supply offending with 38 out of a countywide 238 offences;
- When narrowed to cannabis, 11 of the 81 case occurred in Stevenage placing the CSP joint 2nd highest in the county;
- The Committee was advised that the Stevenage Scorpion team were proactive regarding drug supply regardless of type. In the past 12 months 24

- of the 52 searches related specifically to cannabis were positive;
- Operation SOHO, the policing response to increased tensions between two street gang/groups affiliated with differing areas of the Town which had disrupted some of the cannabis supply within the CSP.

In response to a question, Inspector McPeake advised that Operation Educate which targeted pupils in Year 9 run by the Police in collaboration with individuals with lived experiences, had been very successful and it was hoped it would be rolled out County wide. Police visits were also made to younger pupils to help build positive relationships with the Police at a young age.

The Portfolio Holder advised that she was keen to make services such as the No More Service part of the Council's core funding offer but that this was difficult due to the financial restraints the Council was under.

Town Centre Crime

The following points were made to the Committee in respect of crime in the Town Centre:

- Between 1 January 2023 and 20 March 2023 there were 48 reported shopliftings, 16 reported theft from persons, 5 pedal cycle thefts, 5 personal robberies and 15 other thefts;
- The police response to the Town Centre included:
 - Operation target – 15 minute patrols of identified hotspots;
 - Operation Twist – plain clothes patrols to identify purse dippers within the Town Centre;
 - Various engagement events;
 - Seasonal patrols November – December 2022;
 - Policing priorities set to tackle ASB related issues within the Town.

In response to a comment from the Chair regarding police resources, Inspector McPeake advised that although the Police had more resources and larger teams than previously, the demand for those Police Officers had also increased, both in terms of the administration required and the amount of crime recorded but also the demand relating to mental health cases.

In response to a question regarding the recent Policing Priorities Group held with Members, the Portfolio Holder and the Community Safety Manager agreed to look at the arrangements alongside the police for this meeting going forward.

The Chair thanked inspector McPeake for his attendance and presentation to the Committee.

3 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

4 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

5 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR